MEDIATIZED CULTURAL ACTIVISM

MEDIATIZATION AND THE TRANSFORMATIONS OF CULTURAL ACTIVISM

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INTRODUCTION

Theorizing cultural activism, writes the Billboard Liberation Front, "is like theorizing about sexual intercourse. All the theory in the world isn't going to get you laid, and will in fact probably impede your chances, so why not just shut your mouth, drop the trousers, and get on with it?" (Billboard Liberation Front, 2010, p. 249). This provocative statement is indicative of the Billboard Liberation Front's practice. Since 1977 they have been altering billboards and thus reimagining the world as it is represented in ads. However, while the members of the Billboard Liberation Front claim that they are anchored in the concrete anti-theoretical practices of climbing up on billboards and changing them and that "any pompous gasbag who tries to theorize us is in for the non-theoretical ass-kicking of his life", their practice is in fact highly informed by the historical and theoretical development of new media technologies, globalization, and subsequently the transformations of social movements and activist practices. The authors in this issue of *Conjunctions: Transdisciplinary Journal of Cultural Participation* all risk a "non-theoretical ass-kicking" by engaging with the historical, political, and theoretical conditions that shape contemporary participatory and cultural activist practices.

The articles in this issue investigate the many ways in which participatory cultural activism, in recent years, has become mediatized and entangled with digital networks. As the articles show, similar strategies of "mediatized cultural activism" can be found in a diverse range of participatory activities, including large-scale movements such as the Gezi Park Protests, activists groups such as Femen, non-governmental organizations such as Greenpeace, but also in new fascist networks such as The Immortals. While participatory activist practices are highly diverse and have different targets and goals, the issue explores how the entanglements of participatory activist practices and digital network formations are indicative of a particular mediatized cultural activism. As we will show in the following pages, these mediatized cultural activist practices are closely connected to a number of economical, political, technological, and cultural developments in the societies they engage with and develop from.

TRANSFORMATIONS OF ACTIVIST PARTICIPATION

The Orange Revolution in Ukraine (2004) and the Cedar Revolution in Lebanon (2005) are early examples of so-called internet-organized revolutions, where the internet, citizen journalism, and technologies such as mobile phones and social media play a major defining role. The debates about the role of technology and social media for activist practices and in particular social movements reached mainstream concern in connection with the so-called 'Twitter revolutions' of 2009-2011 (Tremayne, 2015; Mason, 2012). The most famous of these were the election protests in Iran 2009-2010, also known as the Green Revolution, the Tunisian Jasmine Revolution (2010-2011) – which inspired the Arab

Spring – and the Egyptian Revolution of 2011. Popular debates on the Twitter Revolutions often involve a technological optimism that assumes that the internet and the growing number of technological inventions will facilitate participatory activist practices that can overcome the obstacles of, for instance, oppressive states and regimes or hegemonic power structures. Initially, the term 'Twitter revolution' reflected a belief in the power of digital media to connect and mobilize. However, the term was soon contested, for instance through the arguments that participation through and by means of digital networks often results in a form of participation that is more affective than it is informative (Shirky, 2009) and that it risks resulting in low-effort wannabe participation pejoratively named clicktivism (Gladwell, 2010; Roberts, 2014).

As we will explore later, there is good reason to be skeptical about technological optimist assumptions that participants by means of digital networks can sidestep and overcome power structures and that digital networks are inherently emancipatory. Nevertheless, digital networks have in fact facilitated new forms of activist participation and mobilization and created cultural counter narratives, and this is an absolutely necessary premise for changing power structures. In the following and in the articles in this issue of *Conjunctions*, we therefore invite you to explore with us how the power structures of offline forms of activist participation are brought into a new and mediatized arena in which the logics of activist politics and participation are transformed.

The point of departure for this issue of *Conjunctions* is that digital networks and processes of mediatization provide new opportunities as well as obstacles for activism, and it is therefore our task, as researchers, to understand the ways in which activist participation changes when it is increasingly mediatized. Though a diverse range of case studies, the articles in this issue all address and discuss the opportunities and obstacles of mediatized cultural activism. The articles all engage with the ways in which digital and networked culture, technological apparatuses, and database logics facilitate, challenge, transform, and mediatize the ways in which people participate in and construe activism, i.e. the articles investigate how digital networks redesign the modalities of activist participation and ask how we can understand the relation between media, culture, social movements, and activist participatory practices. In the remaining part of this introduction, we will develop an understanding of mediatized cultural activism.

NON-GOVERNMENTAL CITIZEN INITIATIVES AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Since the outbreak of the war in Syria in 2011, a humanitarian disaster has emerged: approximately four million people have fled Syria, more than seven and a half million people are estimated to be internally displaced, and so far 350,000 Syrian refugees have reached the European Union. The representation of the humanitarian crisis in European countries has to a great extent concerned the possible "threat" to the cultural and territorial coherence and stability of European nation states. In Germany and Sweden,

governments have called for other nation states to take responsibility and contribute to the handling of the many refugees, and President of the European Commission, Jean Claude-Juncker, has asked member states to take bold, concerted action, and for people to "imagine for a second if it were you, your children in your arms, the world you know torn apart around you. There is no price you would not pay, no wall you would not climb, no sea you would not go to sea in, no border you would not cross" (Tran, 2015). Despite the need for shared European and global action to resolve the humanitarian crisis, several countries, including Denmark, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary are reluctant to enter into a pan-European agreement on the distribution of refugees.

National and transnational solutions to the humanitarian crisis have been few, and this seems to indicate a stalemate in the operability of the traditional political institutions. On the one hand, this stalemate appears to reaffirm the often-held argument that there is a crisis of political legitimacy. While there is certainly a lack of trust in political institutions – as documented in a number of European Union polls – it does not necessarily entail an elusive civic participation. Rather, civic participation is manifest in a diversification of protest forms (della Porta and Mattoni, 2014, p. 172). This has also been the case in the wake of the humanitarian disaster in Syria and the political stalemate in the European Union. In the political vacuum, a number of non-institutional participants have become mobilized in the effort to create spontaneous and flexible solutions to the humanitarian crisis. The many emerging non-governmental initiatives are often citizen-driven, local, and organized via social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Furthermore, they are manifested in a diverse set of activities ranging from spontaneous welcoming gatherings at asylum centers and railway stations to posting welcoming ads in newspapers, and also through the establishment of more long-term social relations as people welcome refugees into their private homes. But at the same time, disturbingly, the non-governmental mobilization also includes attacks on asylum centers and refuges by neo-Nazi or fascists groups and, more generally, a renewed mobilization of efforts to protect the nation state against the presumed threats of refugees. The shared denominator of these very different non-governmental forms of activist participation is a lack of trust in the ability of political institutions to either protect national borders or to welcome refugees into the national societies. The numerous non-governmental activist practices are thus characterized by being initiated by citizens, and they exhibit a lacking trust in political institutions to manage crises, including the humanitarian crisis that is currently taking place in Syria. Furthermore, these citizen initiatives are often initiated and organized in digital networks, and they are often highly mediatized in their form. They thus exemplify what we in this special issue refer to as cultural activism.

CULTURE AS AN ARENA FOR RESISTANCE AND DOMINATION

Culture is a precondition for power relations and a crucial arena for domination, struggle, and resistance. In the research literature on social movements there is a strong and growing interest in the cultural, affective, and aesthetic dimensions of social movements and political protest, and how social movements engage in cultural resistance (Baumgarten, Daphi and Ulrich 2014; Fabian, Nørgaard og Risager, 2015; Fominaya, 2014). Early 20th century Marxist thinkers such as Gramsci, Marcuse and Lukács explored culture as an arena of struggle and a force that shapes social political reality. In his *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci developed the concept of cultural hegemony and explored how political power rests upon cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1999). According to Gramsci, ruling elites maintain power by creating and upholding hegemonic ideas and ideologies dominant in civil society. But hegemony is not a fixed and stable condition but a constant struggle. Engaging in activism and revolutionary projects thus also implies creating counter narratives, counterhegemonic cultures, and discovering progressive potential within popular culture that can develop into a culture of resistance (Cox, 2011; Duncombe, 2002; Fominaya, 2014; Werbner, Webb and Spellmann-Poots, 2014).

Baumgarten, Daphi, and Ulrich claim that culture is often misleadingly presented antagonistically in a distinction between "structural approaches dealing with material resources, organizations, and institutions and cultural approaches dealing with issues of reception and interpretation (e.g. Smith and Fetner, 2007). Hence, the structural and structuring character of culture is marginalized" (Baumgarten, Daphi, and Ullrich, 2014, p. 5). Culture is thus not only a counterhegemonic practice that challenges and ruptures hegemonic practices, it is also in itself a precondition for political power and domination. Culture is thus not to be understood as a separate field of protest but rather as a precondition for any power and political practice.

Culture is often emphasized as ingrained in activism, but in academic work on cultural activism it is often unclear what culture actually constitutes or is believed to consist of. A number of neologisms have emerged including activist art, art activism, artivism, culture jamming, ethical spectacle, and tactic media. This multiplication of critical terms is, in many ways, "a sign of the very elusiveness of 'cultural activism' as a concept. Many (but by no means all) of these approaches are indebted to critical traditions which, having developed out of different historical circumstances, remain at odds with many of the assumptions which underlie the practices of cultural activism" (Grindon, 2010, p. 21). Furthermore, if we look closer, the neologisms do not refer to the same understanding of what culture is and what its role is in relation to activism. Despite the empirical diversity of cultural activism and consequently the multiplications of critical terms, it is possible to specify different workings of cultural activism. We have therefore identified a number of different ways in which culture as a concept is utilized in relation to cultural activism.

The emphasis on counterhegemonic practices indicates that cultural activism concerns civic life – that is, how citizens come together in communities to form a specific way of living – and thus that cultural activism may be a way to reimagine inter-subjective relations. However, the emphasis on art, media, and spectacle may also refer to an object-oriented understanding of culture and an understanding of culture that is tied to a specific understanding of aesthetics. These two different understandings of cultural activism are connected by Firat and Kuryel, who write that contemporary activist practices are "directed toward disturbing and reorienting the cultural and political sphere by attacking the narratives of truth in society" (2010, p. 10). This implies that activism concerns a reimagining of hegemonic cultural practices and collectivities. Yet, Firat and Kuryel also insist on the importance of culture in another aspect, namely as a tactical tool of activist engagement. Contemporary activist practices are, they write, applying "diverse tactics, such as culture jamming, sousveillance, media hoaxing, adbusting, subvertising, flash mobs, street art, hacktivism, billboard liberation, and urban guerilla, to name but a few. This form of activism, with its insistence on creative interventions based on the notions of humor, playfulness, and confusion appears to bring a novel dimension to conventional strategies of protest" (Firat and Kuryel, 2010, p. 10). In this line of thinking, culture is simultaneously a way of engaging in societal structures by re-orienting narratives of truth and a concrete cultural and creative practice.

Following this, activism comes to concern culture on at least four levels that are often closely intertwined: 1) Cultural activism is a playful practice and a strategy of intervention, engagement, and resistance; 2) This strategy may or may not be an object-oriented ontology that concerns the making and utilization of objects, i.e. strategic actions that make objects recognizable, for instance as art; 3) Cultural activism concerns intersubjective relations, i.e. the ways in which people invest themselves in practices and social-political structures. As such, cultural activism is also a form of affective cultural politics (Reestorff, 2016; Knudsen and Stage, 2014 and 2015) that concerns the ontological, political, symbolic, and affective constitution of society and a practice that ties or reorients the individual life of human beings to different forms of collective communities; 4) Finally, cultural activism is the political and ideological creation of new or the re-orientation toward old ideas and values that are claimed to be fundamental to the workings of society.

MEDIATIZED ACTIVISM

As mentioned above, cultural activism can be defined as playful, political, and novel practices that may or may not utilize specific cultural objects as part of a strategic mobilization, and that concerns itself with the relational life of human beings and the fundamental workings of society. This understanding of cultural activism also entails that it "constitutes one front in the battle over the people's minds and hearts" (Irzik, 2010, p. 137). In this struggle to define or reorient collective communities and inter-subjective

relations, culture is often utilized in specific protest events. Emrah Irzik writes that cultural activism is, in large part, "a struggle to convey dissident viewpoints, truth claims, and alternative significations to the public by making use of the means to which activists are able to gain access. The established for-profit media outlets owned by corporations and influenced by governments are usually inaccessible. Activists, therefore, resort to alternative channels that are either created by or salvaged by activists themselves" (Irzik, 2010, p. 137). This emphasis on dissident viewpoints and on activists' access to media technologies and channels is crucial, because it indicates that participatory and activist practices in the public sphere, in recent years, have been increasingly entangled with networked culture, technological apparatuses, and thus also engaged in struggles around media access, free software, and the digital and cultural commons. These entanglements, we argue, facilitate and accommodate transformations in the ways in which people construe activism and redesign the modalities of activist participation. This has furthermore lead to a process of mediatization in which cultural activism and the radical imagination (Haiven and Khasnabish 2014) have undergone essential transformations. People are to a growing degree no longer just audiences and consumers of media but users, producers, and participants (Bruns, 2008; Jenkins, 2006; Lievrouw, 2011, Fabian and Rowan 2016). Different groups and individuals use and create a variety of digital platforms and tools to build, sustain, and communicate communities.

This transformative capacity of digitally and technologically networked cultures can be understood through the concept of mediatization, which has been important in research dealing with the extension of the role and influence of media in culture, society, and politics (Hjarvard, 2008; Esser and Strömbäck, 2014). The term mediatization refers to complex long-term multidimensional processes of social transformation, whereby media become increasingly influential and dynamically integrated in different spheres of society. The mediatization of politics has a major influence on political processes, institutions, and actors (Hjarvard, 2008; Esser and Strömbäck, 2014). According to Stig Hjarvard, mediatization is the process in which society is increasingly submitted to and becomes dependent upon media and media logics (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 28). Thus, activism is mediatized not only when it is widely documented and circulated but also when both the online and offline activities are adapted to symbols or mechanisms created by the media (Hjarvard, 2008; Reestorff, 2014). Following this understanding of mediatization, cultural activism is mediatized when it adapts to a diverse and fluid set of media practices. Cultural activism is increasingly becoming a process in which online and offline practices are shaped by "*the moulding forces of the media*" (emphasis in original; Hepp, 2011, p. 54).

The common denominator for these mediatized and highly diverse forms of protests seems to be that the revolting subjects (Tyler, 2013), who may or may not invest their bodies in public spaces, rely on the documentation and circulation of their protests. This is particularly evident in the incisive documentation of activism, in which participants are

openly aware of and engage in the production of visual imaginaries. These visual imaginaries serve to document and circulate activism and, accordingly, give offline protests a prolonged online life. Furthermore, the visual imaginaries are feeding media archives. In relation to these media archives, it is crucial for activism to store, communicate, and circulate visual imaginaries and the ideas and values that these imaginaries reflect in order for them to be recognized as valid archival data and thus a part of the collective remembrance and understanding of the fundamental workings of society.

However, mediatization is not only about activism utilizing a range of media practices and documenting, circulating, and archiving their visual imaginaries. In order for activist visual imaginaries to be spreadable and obtain media circulation, activism has also undergone transformations. By means of mediatization, cultural activism aims to become spreadable (Jenkins et al., 2014) and to potentially be embedded in the system of viral quick diffusion of information, which helps produce flexible, decentralized, and agile mobilizations (Kadava, 2014). Accordingly, cultural activism often deliberately attempts to produce newsworthy and spreadable images. In these practices, the media play an increased role, simply because activist practices are targeted and filtered to be circulated online as well as in broadcast media. This has, however, also resulted in a transformation of activist practices, as cultural activism is rendered increasingly personalized and "photogenic" in order to be considered newsworthy, popular and thus spreadable.

INDYMEDIA, CULTURE JAMMING, AND GUERILLA COMMUNICATION

Cultural activism that uses tactical media such as indymedia, culture jamming, and guerilla communication often incarnates mediatization. With the slogan "Don't hate the Media – Be the Media" and the simultaneously physical and virtual creation of an Independent Media Centre (Indymedia), the GJM anti WTO protests in Seattle in 1999 famously created a new way of producing counter narratives through citizen journalism. The GJM later made their publishing software open and accessible for everyone to produce and upload alternative media content and thereby facilitated the Global Indymedia Network (Fominaya, 2014). What emerged on the streets of Seattle, writes Naomi Klien, "was an activist model that mirrors the organic, decentralized interlinked pathways of the Internet" (Klein, 2002, p. 267). Today, the possibilities of the collective and individual self-organized production of news and protests have developed even further with the help of technologies such as 4G mobile phones and social media networks such as Twitter and Facebook. These technological developments enable individuals to document and upload content directly from the streets, private homes, and other places of conflict and struggle, and they thereby create new activist opportunities. Indeed, these "looser structures have allowed for a type of activism that is characterized by both accessibility and creativity" (Day, 2011, p. 157). But these new and more loosely structured types of activism also raise new critical questions both regarding the mediatized transformations of activist practices,

and also, for instance, about the price that is paid when alternative and critical counter narratives (Cox and Fominaya, 2013) make use of corporate and highly surveyed media platforms.

The terms culture jamming and guerilla communication have been important in trying to grasp both the political and the aesthetic characteristics of mediatized and tactical media techniques that are utilized in cultural activism. Culture jamming is a form of political action that tries to turn corporate power against itself by disrupting and jamming dominant messages, and mixing politics, art, and humor (Peretti, 2001a, 2001b). On the one hand, culture jamming is the activists' attempts to "capture attention that has not already been granted them", and thus "entertainment value is key to the success of their actions as, at the very least, it assures they will be noticed" (Day, 2011, p. 148). But on the other hand, culture jamming also uses practices that draw on historical traditions from Dadaists and situationists, such as détournement (Boyd 2002; Duncombe, 2002; Lievrouw, 2011; Peretti 2001a, 2001b). These historical traditions and the emphasis on détournement are often also a way to ensure that culture jamming and guerilla communication are not just being noticed because they produce pleasure through entertainment. The historical tradition of détournement is also a way to engage in the distortion of meanings by reusing and recombining fragmentary materials. These strategies combine the Dadaists' methods of collage and montage with carnivalesque traditions of humor and satire (Duncombe, 2002) and bring them together in a viral virtual sphere. Hence, the goal of tactical media, such as culture jamming and guerilla communication, is twofold: to capture attention and to critically appropriate and subvert fragments of existing culture and images.

THE LEVERAGE OF MEDIATIZED ACTIVISM

As indicated above, mediatized activism has a dual goal to capture attention and subvert meaning in order to engage in the creation of ideas and values fundamental to the workings of society. However, the emphasis on mediatization and the capturing of attention also calls for cautions. When engaging in the study of mediatized cultural activism, it is important to be cautious about technological determinism, an overemphasis on online mobilization, and on questions of democratic empowerment and measurable impact.

Mediatization must not, we argue, be understood as technological determinism. Even though cultural activism can be said to adapt its practice to media logics, these logics must not "be treated as a unitary logic 'behind' the media" (Hepp, 2011, p. 45). Rather, mediatization must be conceptualized as fluid processes. This is important because it underlines that cultural activism cannot simply predict what is being documented and circulated. What captures attention and becomes spreadable cannot simply be predicted through a stable set of parameters.

The fact that cultural activism is increasingly mediatized does not mean that it does not rely on offline mobilization and resistance practices. As it has been argued by Carsten Stage (2013) in relation to contemporary crowd formations, postmodern crowds require a media sensitive typology that prioritizes the role of physical co-presence in different ways. Stage thus suggests a distinction between three kinds of crowd formations: 1) The traditional body to body crowd is based on physical co-presence; 2) The mediated crowd has a strong offline dimension, but also uses media technologies as tools or communication environments; 3) Finally, the online crowd can be defined as the affective unification and relative synchronization of a public in relation to a specific online site (Stage, 2013). This emphasis on different kinds of crowd formation that prioritize the relation between media and physical presence differently is crucial in understanding mediatized activism. It is important to keep in mind that mediatized activism is not only a media practice. Rather, the dependency and intertwining of media, online, and offline practices must be considered in each empirical case in order to understand the impact of media technologies and networks on that particular activist practice and its form, distribution, content, and impact.

Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that mediatization is not a normative concept and that it is not necessarily put to use in emancipatory activist practices. As Rikke Peters shows in the present publication, actors with an explicit anti-democratic and anti-pluralist agenda also utilize the communicative potentials of media technologies and networks. Moreover, as it has been noted, for instance, by John Michael Roberts (2014), digital technologies do not only have the potential to empower people and establish new democratic capabilities. They also play a crucial role in monitoring and regulating the behavior of citizens. Digital surveillance systems, for instance, play a fundamental role in providing data and monitoring, managing, and controlling specific populations and supporting neoliberalism and the marketization of society (Roberts, 2014). This involves hybrid forms of surveillance that map human behavior and subjects, but are "still heavily dependent on a central mechanism of authority and coercion, as well as a whole host of related government bodies like public-private partnerships, in order to function properly" (Roberts, 2014, p. 121).

It is often emphasized that activism must have a direct and measurable impact on institutional politics. During the rise of the so-called 'Twitter revolutions', high hopes were invested in the emancipatory potentials of digital technologies and networks. However, when the many revolutions did not immediately lead to transformations and institutional neoliberal democracies (following a Western model), several authors were quick to disinherit the potential of digital technologies in social movements. As already mentioned, Clay Shirky argued that Twitter's impact was more affective than informational. Emphasizing the emotional capacities, he wrote: "As a medium gets faster, it gets more emotional. We feel faster than we think […] Twitter makes us empathize. It makes us part of it. Even if it's just retweeting, you're aiding the goal that dissidents have always sought:

the awareness that the outside world is paying attention is really valuable" (Shirky, 2009). In Shirky's perspective, digital networks are potent tools due to their emotional, but not informational, capacities. These emotional ties are, however, dismissed by Malcolm Gladwell, who argues that digital network activism is a form of organization, "which favors the weak-tie connections" and "shifts our energies from organizations that promote strategic and disciplined activity and toward those, which promote resilience and adaptability. It makes it easier for activists to express themselves, and harder for that expression to have any impact" (Gladwell, 2010). It is certainly correct that digital media technologies can facilitate weak-tie connections, such as clicktivism, and that, despite mediatization and media circulation, there is no guarantee that cultural activism will have a lasting impact. But it is too easy simply to dismiss mediatized activism as a low-impact and thus insignificant practice.

As a response to the many concerns about mediatized activist practices, several scholars have grappled with questions of mediatized activism, its lasting connections, and impact on the institutional system. Izrik (2010), for instance, argues that his main gripe with the prevalent trend in today's cultural activism is that it is not grounded in actual struggles. He is concerned with cultural activism's "relative lack of suggestions for an active, positive course for social change and the relative lack of a grounded link to the actual struggles taking place against systems of oppression", and he is skeptical about the claim that the duty of the radical is to criticize what exists, because he fears that the critique might neglect to propose alternatives. Criticism, he writes, "is doubtless a required first step in working toward social change, but stopping at negative criticism should not be the response to fears of a dogmatic 'one true path' taking hold and stifling diverse critique" (Izrik, 2010, p. 146). The concern is that cultural activism often refrains from dogmatic solutions and often expresses a self-doubt that might be interpreted as an ironic disposition or self-oriented morality in which "doing good to others is about 'how I feel'" (Chouliaraki, 2014, p. 3-4).

However, we proceed to argue that in order to understand mediatized cultural activism it is not sufficient to focus on the direct impact on the institutional political system. While the state is an important target for many cases of mediatized cultural activism, "policy or legal changes are not necessarily the best indicators of social movement impact, or of social change more broadly" (Fominaya, 2014, p. 195). As argued by Christina Flesher Fominaya, the importance and success of social movements and cultural activist participation must be understood "beyond the narrowly-defined arena of the political". Despite a cultural turn in social movement studies, "practices of cultural resistance and change are often marginalized in favour of more overtly political aspects of mobilizations" (Fominaya, 2014, p. 195). Following this, the impact of mediatized cultural activism cannot only be measured against changes in the institutional political system. Studies of mediatized cultural activism must take into account the non-institutional and slow transformations that may occur when mediatized cultural activism engages in the forces that

shape social reality through the creation and alteration of ideas and values dominant in civil society. Studies of mediatized cultural activism must thus address "questions of how people make sense of their world and actions, how they render cultural products meaningful, and how they interpret their grievances as political for themselves and others" (Baumgarten, Daphi and Ulrich, 2014).

This emphasis on the necessity of moving beyond the realm of institutional politics when evaluating cultural activism is also a call for an explicit engagement with the forms of participation mobilized in and through cultural activism. Mirko Tobias Schäefer has argued that studies of participation – and, in this context, cultural activism – must not disregard the fact that participating in cultural production does not necessarily mean participating in power structures (Schäfer, 2011, p. 45). Thus, when engaging with mediatized cultural activism, it is necessary to understand the way in which participants come into contact with media technologies as well as power structures. Schäfer argues that while explicit participation is certainly driven by motivation and is, we might add, explicitly mediatized in order to gain attention and engage with power structures, it is still dependent on skills and abilities; "critical activism, anti-hegemonic attitudes or altruistic motives is not sufficient. Explicit participation is heterogeneous and concerns users who range from unskilled novices to professional programmers" (Schäfer, 2011, p. 51). It is therefore not sufficient for cultural activists to have access to media technologies and digital networks, they must also possess skills, and in order for their participation to be meaningful, they must question and negotiate how people make sense of their world and actions.

The argument is that studies of mediatized cultural activism must concern the ways in which people participate, including whether and how they come into contact with power structures. These power structures are not necessarily confined to the realm of institutional politics but also concern the ways in which people engage in intersubjective relations and negotiate their sense of the world. This is also related to a second argument, namely that mediatized cultural activism may be studied and evaluated as a practice of deliberative participation and prefigurative politics.

DEMOCRACY, GOVERNMENTALITY, AND NEOLIBERALISM

Cultural activism and new social movements often engage in prefigurative politics, where the movements are fighting for social changes and trying to embody these changes in life practices, cultures, and processes of decision-making. In this regard, an important field of exploration and discussion is how digital media technologies and networks are capable of both enhancing and decreasing democratic processes and practices. During the last decades, we have seen complex and contradictory democratic transformations in which forms of non-governmental activist participation are multiplying, and the number of electoral democracies has almost doubled. But at the same time old existing institu-

tional democracies are increasingly met with distrust by critical and protesting citizens (Strömbäck and Esser, 2014). Media and mediatization must therefore be analyzed in relation to both the establishments of new democracies and the crisis of legitimacy in the older democracies. It is, as mentioned, often emphasized that digital media and networks have provided new opportunities in terms of democratic activation and empowerment of non-institutional voices (Jenkins, 2006; Benkler, 2006; Fenton, 2008; Bruns, 2008; Gauntlett, 2011; Lievrouw, 2011). However, digital media and networks also provide new forms of governmentality and contribute to the blurring of boundaries between the private, public, and commercial. Thus, when engaging with mediatized cultural activism, we must also concern ourselves with the relations and tensions between reinventions of governmentality and emancipatory possibilities.

A great deal of critique has been expressed concerning the ways in which digitalization has become embedded with new forms of governmentality. John Michael Roberts has made a harsh critique of "the social" in social media and argued that social media are an expressive medium for neoliberal ideology (Roberts, 2014, p. 94). Among other aspects, he criticizes the heralding of deliberative participatory democracy by customers and clients of the welfare state, and he links this to neoliberal ideals of "choice" and "personalization" in service delivery and finally to the privatization of civil society (Roberts, 2014). Digital technologies, networks, and processes of mediatization are, as mentioned, not normative. These technologies and processes are not inherently democratic or oppressive. They might be put to use in a neoliberal ideology, and they might be used in an oppressive manner, but they might also be part of democratic deliberation (della Porta and Rucht, 2013). Again, it must be emphasized, that any study of mediatized cultural activism requires a scrutiny of the forms of participation, i.e. the ways in which participants come into contact with power structures.

The scrutiny of participation and mediatized cultural activism is, however, often a bothersome task. Mediatized cultural activism is messy. It intertwines offline and online practices, its impact is not always easily measurable, and it is not necessarily identifiable as a democratic or emancipatory practice. This also entails that questions of the relation between digital media technologies, mediatization, and cultural activism are rarely easy to answer, but must always consider two – intertwined – opportunities and challenges. First of all, digital media technologies and networks have provided a new arena in which cultural, political, and social struggles are fought. This opens a range of new protest opportunities, but it also offers challenges given that traditional social hierarchies and power structures are not necessarily erased or sidestepped. Social hierarchies and power structures have simply entered a new mediatized political arena. Secondly, in order for participatory cultural activists to be recognized as political participants in this mediatized political arena they must also transform their activist practices. Thus, the main concern of the articles in this volume is to investigate the ways in which participatory activist

projects are changing their modes of operation in order to function and be recognized as legitimate political players within a mediatized political arena.

MEDIATIZED CULTURAL ACTIVISM

All the contributors to this special issue are involved in the investigations and theorization of new and emerging forms of participatory politics and the ways in which cultural activism is transformed in relation to different forms of mediatized practices. The articles address several topics of concern: 1) First, the articles address questions of what a politics of participation – and of collectivities – might be in the Anthropocene, 2) the articles address the assemblage of events in mass movements' resistance of state power, 3) the articles investigate local responses to mediatized events, and 4) the articles address action repertoires that are often overlooked when engaging with mediatized activism, namely mediatized cultural activism conducted by extreme right groups, activism that deliberately shames humanitarian forms of participation, and finally mediatized cultural activism that is not necessarily media-savvy and vocal, but rather thrives in and through silence.

The first article in the issue is a conversation between Birgitte Lesanner, from Greenpeace, and Camilla Møhring Reestorff. In their conversation – "LEGO: Everything is NOT awesome! A conversation about mediatized activism, Greenpeace, Lego, and Shell" – they discuss the mediatized activist practices that Greenpeace engaged in in their *Save the Arctic* campaign and their efforts to end the collaboration between Lego and Shell through the campaign *LEGO: Everything is NOT awesome* (Greenpeace, 2014). The conversation investigates the concept of mediatization and how Greenpeace accommodates media logics and deliberately seeks to foster online spreadability. In the conversation, they focus on the importance of popular culture in creating recognizability as well as the utilization of humor and culture jamming. The conversation further explores the relation between mediatized practices and mobilization and tackles questions of the ways in which Greenpeace mobilizes different forms of activist participation – from online clicktivism to offline campaigns at oil drilling sites. Finally, the conversation dives into the ways in which Greenpeace envisions a sustainable future.

The emphasis on sustainability and on finding ways of surviving well is elaborated in J.K. Gibson-Graham's article "Ethical Economic and Ecological Engagements in Real(ity) Time: Experiments with Living Differently in the Anthropocene". In the article, Gibson-Graham understands the Anthropocene as offering an opportunity to be affected by different temporalities and participate in a newly constituted collective. The article examines select examples of actual and fictional reality TV programs in which ordinary people wrestle with concerns that are explicitly *not* those of the neoliberal capitalist imaginary, but concerns that are attuned to the task of changing everyday embodied practices of surviving well, distributing wealth, encountering, connecting, and sharing with others. The

article is concerned with how to take these sparks of an emerging and different common sense and fan them into widespread collective action that reshapes the way we live on this planet. In order to consider what a politics of participation might be in the Anthropocene, the author utilizes four inspirational approaches: Michael Hardt's conception of a militant biopolitics, the ideas of Michel Callon and John Law about qualculation, William Connolly's insights into affective registers that resonate with the 'sweetness of life', and J.K. Gibson-Graham's diverse economy (re)framing. Gibson-Graham thus argues for the need to support experiments with living in new ways by differentiating our economic world and opening up the economy as a site of ethical practice that acknowledges a being-in-common with human and earth others.

Balca Arda's article "The Construction of a New Sociality through Social Media: The Case of the Gezi Uprising in Turkey" focuses on an uprising that sprung from a small group of environmentalists that were concerned with precisely the questions of living well in the Anthropocene. In her article, Arda studies how during Turkey's Gezi Park Protests in the summer of 2013 millions of people, became connected as fellow protesters. In the early days of the Gezi movement, the participatory activism through social media made visible the police brutality exercised in the last days of May 2013 against a small group of environmentalists who were protecting Gezi Park from being demolished in order to build a shopping mall. The article critically examines viral images, memes, and posts widely shared by Gezi protesters on social media and analyzes the ways in which patterns of contradictory interactions formed, evaluated, or triggered various types of social relationships. The widely shared viral images, memes, and text messages, Arda argues, provided the content to collaboratively construct and publicly frame the autonomous logic of the "Gezi spirit" by the Gezi protesters. Furthermore, this is analyzed through a new understanding of collective identity in autonomous logic processed through social media as a being-with (mit-sein), rather than a fusion of the individual to an enigmatic we-ness in order to represent an "I". This autonomous collectivity is driven by fluidarity as a public experience of the self in relation to the other without intermediary apparatuses, and hence it is conceptualized as having built a new sociality.

In "*#Je suis Charlie*: Networks, Affects and Distributed Agency of Media Assemblage", Inka Salovaara likewise analyzes a large movement. In her analysis of the *Je suis Charlie* movement and related memes, hashtags, and narratives, Salovaara develops an understanding of the movement as an affective assemblage. The article analyzes the digital network activism around the *Charlie Hebdo* shootings in the perspective of the Deleuzian concepts of *assemblage* and *event* and argues that new participatory activism can be understood in two ways: as a (territorialized) "assemblage" (Delanda, 2006) and as a constellation of "things" into a "transient structure" (Thrift, 2007; Salovaara, 2014). Drawing from assemblage theory, Salovaara further explores concrete and virtual sides of a media *assemblage* as event spaces.

In "Counterpublics in the age of mediatisation: Local responses to Femen in the Arab world", Kaouthar Darmoni and Tamara Witschge investigate what may happen when mediatized cultural activism results in incongruences between the mediatized strategy of a global protest group – Femen – and local communities. In their article, Darmoni and Witschge employ the concept of counterpublics and argue that Femen have had limited impact in the Arab world due to a lack of embedment in local communities and that the mediatized protests strategy can hamper the dual function of counterpublic discourse and action. The article argues that by focusing primarily outwardly and adopting dominant media logics (outwardly focused, *inter*public discourse), Femen's protest strategies give way to a sensational and top-down message. While being mediatized, this message is not embedded in a conversation with local communities (the inwardly focused *intra*public function of counterpublic discourse), and as such it results in much resistance in parts of the Arab world. Moving beyond an analysis of Femen's message to include local Arab responses, Darmoni and Witschge document that Femen's antagonistic actions in this context foster alienation rather than empowerment.

The Femen movement exemplifies a case in which the mediatized activist movement is challenged by local alienation. This potential controversy of mediatized strategies is highlighted even further when Rikke Alberg Peters engages with a neo-fascist network – *The Immortals* (*Die Unsterblichen*). Peters thus documents the ways in which extreme right groups also utilize the contentious action repertoires in which online and street activism intertwine. In her article "Become Immortal! Mediatization and mediation processes of extreme right protest", Peters presents a case study of a 2011 flash mob, which was disseminated on YouTube for the so-called "Become Immortal" campaign. The street protest was designed for and adapted to the specific characteristics of online activism. In order to analyze the protest form, the visual aesthetics, and the discourse of *The Immortals*, the article mobilizes the concepts of *media practice*, *mediation*, and *mediatization* and argues that the current transformation and modernization processes of the extreme right can be conceptualized and understood through the lens of these three concepts.

In "Mediatizing Shame: Posthumanitarianism and Participatory Development Ethics in Radi-Aid's Activist Awareness Campaigns" Camilla Møhring Reestorff studies the *Norwegian Students and Academics' International Assistance Fund's* (SAIH) hoax advocacy campaign, Radi-Aid. Radi-Aid is certainly different than *The Immortals*, but the cases share similarities because they are both controversial forms of participation. Radi-Aid is controversial not only because it constitutes mediatized cultural activism, but also because it is critical towards humanitarianism. In the article, Reestorff distinguishes between advocacy campaigns that are designed as fundraising and awareness campaigns targeted at changing political attitudes towards humanitarianism and argues that Radi-Aid is a mediatized activist awareness campaign that negotiates participatory development ethics and the functionality of celebrities and lifestyle posthumanitarianism. While posthumanitarianism might simply be dismissed, for instance, through notions of low

engagement participation such as clicktivism and lifestyle activism, the article argues that Radi-Aid is itself a form of posthumanitarianism – détournement – that simultaneously shames participants and makes existent humanitarian communities present to one another and turns them into political collectives. As such, the article interprets Radi-Aid as a reconfiguration of posthumanitarianism that offers the shamed a remedy by means of the participatory development ethics.

Radi-Aid exemplifies a mediatized activist practice in which participants are being named and shamed. The practice of naming is in stark contrast to *El Sileutazo*, the public drawing and placarding of nameless silhouettes during the military dictatorship in Argentina from 1976 to 1983. The aesthetic mobilization of anonymity in Argentine activist practices is studied by Christoph Brunner in "Affective Politics of Sensation: Anonymity and Transtemporal Activism in Argentina". Brunner argues that anonymity can instigate an affective politics of sensation. Different from the human rights discourse on disappearance concerned with politics of identification of the disappeared and the repressors, anonymity, Brunner argues, offers forms of affective relaying beyond identity in relation to a "distribution of the sensible" that takes aesthetics of sense perception as the target of control (Rancière, 2004). Through investigating the silhouettes not as universal signifiers of disappearance but as aesthetic expressions with the potential to move across space and time, the article unfolds a media ecological conception of activist practices and their capacities to activate transtemporal forms of resistance.

We are happy to launch this issue on mediatized cultural activism, and we thank the contributors for engaging openly with the issue at hand and the reviewers for providing constructive feedback in support of the authors.

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